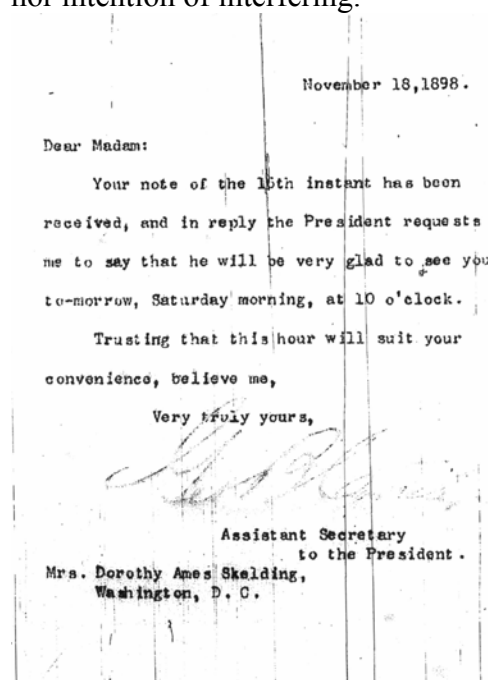


the next few days, McKinley received letters written by Wilmington's African Americans begging for help and by others pleading with the president on behalf of the blacks in the South.<sup>8</sup>

The letters to McKinley reflect a spectrum of responses to the violence and the desire for governmental involvement. Out-of-state correspondents stressed the patriotism of African Americans as they appealed to McKinley's honor and implored intervention: "[I]f there needs to be a standing army, please send one." Letters from Wilmington reflected a different tone and demonstrated the fearfulness of the city's blacks: "[A]re we to die like rats in a trap?" Three days after the riot, one correspondent who said that she could not "sign [her] name and live" wrote a detailed account of the violence, intimidation and banishment campaign. At the top of her letter she asked the President to "send relief as soon as possible or we perish." In the body of her note, she explained that many in the city would gladly go to Africa because of the violence: "[T]oday we are mourners in a strange land with no protection near. God help us." Another correspondent who was "afraid to own [his] name" wrote to McKinley that blacks were overpowered "with the rapid fire of the guns, and they had

cannons, in wagons, and they set fire to almost half of the City."<sup>9</sup>

Harry Hayden of the Wilmington Light Infantry, writing well after the event, recorded that McKinley met with Mrs. A. B. Skelding, wife of one of the members of the Group Six who was privy to the plans for the coup. According to Hayden, Mrs. Skelding was a native of Ohio and neighbor to the president when they were young. She visited with the president in Washington after the violence to explain her views of the situation, and counseled that the "Wilmington Rebellion" was necessary to return the city to white rule. Hayden quoted the President as saying that he understood the issues at hand and had "neither the wish nor intention of interfering."<sup>10</sup>



Record of Dorothy Skelding meeting with McKinley, November 19, 1898.  
Image: Papers of William McKinley, National Archives microfilm

McKinley, November 12, 1898, McKinley Papers, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> A collection of letters received by McKinley is held in the Department of Justice files for 1898 in the National Archives. One of the letters was written to Marcus Hanna, Ohio U.S. senator and McKinley confidant, by S. E. Huffman of the United States Anti-Mob and Lynch Law Association who asked Hanna to use his influence with the President to facilitate an investigation of events in Wilmington. S. E. Huffman to Marcus Hanna, November 29, 1898, Department of Justice Files, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

<sup>9</sup> Letters to President McKinley, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives. For full text of this and other letters, see Appendix J.

<sup>10</sup> Hayden, *WLI*, 98.